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Issues in Improving Urban Schools: Dropout Prevention, Alternate Secondary Education, and Urban Teaching Careers

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ABSTRACT

This report discusses three major issues in urban education: dropout prevention, secondary education for Hispanic Americans, and urban teaching careers. Current studies on dropping out attempt to locate the responsibility for high dropout rates in policies or practices that schools initiate and have the power to change. Findings of these studies are discussed. Hispanic students have not profited from their education, nor have they been well served by the schools. Their academic achievement and educational attainment are among the lowest of any group. Precipitating factors, such as poverty and poor English, are discussed and suggestions are made for increasing the relevance of public education for Hispanics. Difficulties in attracting and retaining a high quality urban teaching force are discussed. Three requirements for improving the situation are: designing appropriate preservice education programs for urban teachers, improving recruitment practices, and structuring work conditions to ensure the retention and continued development of competent professionals. Examples of each are covered. Teachers will improve the quality of their own work lives by learning to be more responsive to the needs of their urban students. References are included. (PS)

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ISSUES IN IMPROVING URBAN SCHOOLS: DROPOUT PREVENTION, HISPANIC SECONDARY EDUCATION, AND URBAN TEACHING CAREERS

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Urban School Dropouts: New Perspectives on Causes and Solutions

One of the most highly publicized current problems in urban education has been the large numbers of students who drop out of school before graduating. Overall, rural schools have more dropouts than urban schools, but the problem is especially acute for urban schools because they lose greater proportions of students. Compared to nationwide dropout rates estimated at 14 to 25%, urban school systems often report rates of 30 to 43%, and the dropout rates of some subgroups of urban students are as high as 69% (Hammack, 1986). Any discussion of trends and issues in urban education might well begin by asking the question: what's new regarding dropouts? Although the problem of school dropout has risen to prominence in educational policy and practice in the past (e.g., Hoyt, 1962), this time around there are a number of significant differences.

First, public and professional interest in the dropout problem is arguably greater than ever before, for several reasons. The sheer magnitude of the problem is alarming. The dropout rate has been much higher in other eras; in the early decades of the century, only 10 to 20% percent of males graduated from high school, and even as recently as the 1950s the dropout rate exceeded 55% (Tyack & Hansot, 1984). Since 1980, however, the average educational attainment of the adult population has risen to nearly 13 years of schooling, in part due to relatively low dropout rates in the 1960s (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1985). A high school diploma has come to be regarded as the minimally acceptable level of attainment, and dropping out has become an economic liability as well as a social stigma.

The consequences of dropping out are increasingly serious. In an information-based, technologically-oriented economy, jobs for unskilled, poorly educated workers are more and more scarce; school dropouts cannot compete in such conditions and soon find themselves trapped in poverty and unemployment, with all the attendant problems. For example, in 1982, of the spring high school graduates who did not enroll in college (49%), 82% were employed, while the employment rate for 670,000 students who had dropped out of school that year was just over 48% (U.S. Department of Labor, 1983). Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that dropouts earn on average approximately $4,000 less each year than high school graduates, and $7,500 less than persons with some college experience (American Council on Education, 1984). Economists and sociologists debate whether a diploma actually matters to those youth who, whether they graduate or not, might be on the

bottom rung of the "economic preparedness" ladder, but it seems clear that an individual's options are seriously curtailed without that diploma.

The results of high dropout rates are detrimental for society as well. As stated forcefully in A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a poorly trained workforce weakens the productive social, economic, and political capacities of the country as a whole. Moreover, early school leaving is not distributed randomly across the population, but affects some racial/ethnic groups and social classes more than others. Conservative estimates from the "High School and Beyond" study put the rate for blacks at 17.2%, for Hispanics at 19.1%, and for students from low-income families at 22.3% (Peng, Takai, & Fetters, 1983). Other studies show rates as high as 47% for Hispanics and 61% for blacks in some urban areas (Hammack, 1986). In contrast to the notion of education as society's great equalizer, high school graduation becomes a mechanism of sorting and contributes to wide social and economic rifts within the social structure (Meyer, 1977). Clearly, the social goal of educational equity for all students is not being achieved.

Finally, the dropout problem is vexing because it thumbs a sad and defiant nose at the growing sophistication of the educational enterprise. Gage's observation, made some eight years ago (Gage, 1978), that educators have finally developed a scientific basis for their work is even more true today. Practitioners, and the researchers who systematize the knowledge of practice, claim advanced theoretical and technical understanding of how to teach students and run schools. State and local policymakers are holding schools accountable for delivering on what they promise and often stake their own political reputations in doing so. Hence, a persistently high dropout rate is a blight on the optimism of everyone concerned.

The growing interest in dropouts has encouraged greater quality and analytic complexity in the efforts to study the problem. There is, to begin, an effort to articulate more precisely the definition of a dropout and to standardize reporting practices within and among school districts (Morrow, 1986). Schools vary in the precision with which they maintain records on reasons for early school leaving (military service, pregnancy or marriage, transfer to a private school or move to another city) and which acts are officially considered "dropping out." Haphazard reporting practices may inflate or deflate a school's true dropout rate, often so that a school can become eligible for extra funding for dropout prevention or so that it can avoid a negative reputation. Districts also differ in the way dropout rates are computed. Some include ninth graders or special categories of students in the count, while others do not; some compute a yearly dropout rate for the district while others report longitudinal rates for cohorts of students. The baseline number used to compute dropout statistics might be a district's average daily attendance or its average daily enrollment. Closer attention to how dropout statistics are compiled by school districts will have three important effects: more accurate comparisons of school holding power between schools and school districts, better assessments of the effects of particular interventions on different types of dropouts, and a long-term improvement in the ability to target funding to areas of critical need.

Traditional dropout research has sought to identify the background characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of dropouts, in an effort to locate causes and sometimes infer solutions. But this work has often led to broad generalizations that focus on ascribed characteristics of students--their race or social class, for example--which may not be the true roots of the problem. Furthermore, the usual, often implicit, conclusion has been that the deficiency rests with individual students, not with the school. The current work on dropouts does not assume that dropouts form a homogeneous group whose characteristics predispose them to school failure; it attempts to look more closely at variations in social and economic background, personality traits, or prior aptitude and school performance, and to examine why such characteristics correlate with early school leaving. Perhaps the most important development in the new forms of research has been to take school context as problematic and study how characteristics of schools--either independently or in interaction with student variables--affect dropping out. Such factors as school or class size, guidance services, tracking and ability grouping practices, curriculum and instructional quality, and student-teacher relationships may mediate individual characteristics to produce early school leaving. Either through the analysis of school variables themselves or through inferences about school context from student data, it may be possible to locate the responsibility for high dropout rates in policies or practices that schools initiate and have the power to change.

These new research directions have yielded a wealth of information and raised many questions. It remains clear, for example, that Hispanics and blacks suffer disproportionately high dropout rates. However, a closer analysis indicates that when other factors are held constant, blacks are less likely to drop out than whites and Hispanics (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986), and their dropout rate has been in decline, from 26% in 1971 to about 18% in 1981 (College Entrance Examination Board, 1985). However, blacks experienced a significant increase in the dropout rate for 14- and 15-year-olds during this period, with the problem especially acute for black females. Dropout rates for blacks are also higher in schools with greater percentages of blacks (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1985). These trend data suggest a number of possible contributing factors. Desegregation, compensatory education, and the improved economic status of some minority families may be helping more blacks to finish school, while such phenomena as rising rate of teenage childbearing have negative effects.

Ekstrom et al. (1986) note that dropouts in the "High School and Beyond" study tended to come from families with a "weaker educational support system." These dropouts had fewer study aids in the home, less opportunity for nonschool related learning, mothers with lower levels of formal education and lower educational expectations for their children, mothers who were more likely to be working, and parents who were less likely to monitor children's activities. Many studies report that the parents of dropouts typically did not finish school themselves, and a 1985 study in Los Angeles found that the parents of fewer than half of the city's dropouts encouraged their children to stay in school, while a fourth of the dropouts' parents actually encouraged them to drop out (Self, 1985). Family circumstances may lead some students to drop out against their own, and their parents', desires. More than 13%

of male dropouts in a sample of over 2,000 cited economic need or other family responsibilities as their reason for leaving school early (Peng, et al., 1983); for Hispanics this figure may be as high as 38% (Rumberger, 1983). Educators are using such findings, not to blame parents for academic failure, as was the tendency during the years following the major reports by Coleman (1966) and Jencks et al. (1972), but to provide an important rationale for school practices that improve parent support for and involvement in education. One of the benefits of targeting educational services to pregnant and parenting teens, for example, is said to be that helping young mothers finish school may improve their children's chances for educational success.

Early school leaving, as well as academic failure in general, is highly correlated with low socioeconomic status. For white and Hispanic students, the dropout rate declines steadily as socioeconomic status rises; the trend is generally true for blacks as well, though not as consistently (NCES, 1985). In fact, when socioeconomic status is held constant, race does not correlate with dropping out. But what is it about being poor that leads one to drop out of school? It could be simply the need for more money: in the national "High School and Beyond" study (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986), 11% of the dropouts surveyed claimed that they had left school because their families needed the income they could get from a job. Family problems brought on by poverty--nonpermanent living conditions, poor nutrition, the need for older children to help care for siblings, or simply the lack of consistent economic and emotional security--may make it difficult for students to concentrate on school.

The hopelessness that pervades communities with persistently high unemployment may also curtail enthusiasm for school; economically disadvantaged students who feel that school will not help them get a job may drop out. Unfortunately, these feelings may be based on fact. For example, the vocational education programs in which many low-income students are enrolled have been severely criticized as being outdated, providing poor job training that does not lead to subsequent employment, failing to "certify" a student in the same way an academic track does, and in effect cheating students out of their futures (Oakes, 1983). General educational tracks have been similarly criticized for their inability to produce real student benefits. In a 1968 study (Comb & Colley, 1968), 73.2% of the students who dropped out of school had been enrolled in the general track, and 6.8% of the dropouts were vocational education students. Twelve years later, over 19% of sophomores enrolled in vocational education and over 16% of sophomores enrolled in general education left school early, compared with less than 6% of the academic track students (NCES, 1985). Such findings indicate that vocational and general education tracks have not succeeded in providing school programs that keep students in school, and have motivated educators to reexamine the learning needs of low-income students and to consider providing better work-school linkages, attending to the daily living problems of students and improving the quality of instruction in vocational and general education, as well as questioning placement of students in these tracks to begin with.

Being overage is another significant correlate of dropping out (Hammack, 1986). But being overage in itself does not completely explain why students leave school early. Although as many as 40% of dropouts leave school as soon as they are legally permitted to do so, others hang on longer. In New York, for example, almost 20% of dropouts are approximately 19 years old (Hammack, 1986). Foley and McConnaughy (1982) reported that many students in New York's alternative high schools are overage, but nevertheless enroll specifically in order to get a diploma, and often do so. Students apparently do not outgrow a desire for learning, so the correlation between being overage and dropping out may say less about students' failure to learn than about schools' failure to teach. Students who drop out may be succumbing to the cumulative effects of school failure, since most overage students have been retained in school one or more years. It is interesting to note that a significant proportion (as many as 17% of the "High School and Beyond" follow-up cohort) of high school dropouts re-enroll in an educational institution and eventually obtain a high school equivalency diploma. For all racial/ethnic groups alike, although vocational education and general education students tend to drop out more frequently, it is the dropouts from the academic curriculum who reenter some form of schooling at high rates (23.5% for whites, 31.8% for blacks, and 16.6% for Hispanics) (NCES, 1985). Apparently, these students have learned the value of schooling or have acquired basic skills well enough to be willing to pursue an education even when they did not succeed the first time around.

By far the most significant predictors of early school leaving are low academic achievement and behavior problems in school. Dropouts have lower grades and lower scores on standardized achievement tests. They do less homework, cut classes more frequently, and do not participate in extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, they tend to have been suspended from school at least once and are more often absent or tardy (Ekstrom et al., 1986). Again, delving a bit deeper into the problem, interesting findings emerge. In an analysis of data that tested many possible causes for suspension, Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles (1982) found great differences among schools in the rates at which they suspended the same kinds of students, suggesting that discipline problems may be a function of schools themselves and not simply student misbehavior. Similarly, actual differences in ability levels of dropouts are much smaller than might be assumed from their school performance and decision to leave school early. Research indicates that at least half of those students who drop out have the intelligence to complete high school, and that perhaps 10% could go on to college (Elliott & Voss, 1974). In fact, in the "High School and Beyond" survey, less than 10% of eventual dropouts predicted that they would not complete high school. Instead, among sophomores who eventually dropped out of school, 44% of the Hispanics, 60% of the blacks, and 45% of the whites expected to pursue education <u>beyond</u> the high school level. Although these figures may reflect societal expectations more than realistic personal aspirations, it does not appear that students leave school solely because they are not capable of doing the work or because they do not want to complete their education. Instead, it may be that they find themselves caught in a cycle of failure not entirely of their own making.

Dropping out appears to be a reasonably unpremeditated decision. Many students who drop out during the summer simply fail to return to school in the fall. During the school year, students drop out gradually by exceeding an allowable number of consecutive absences. If dropping out is not their deliberate intent, why do students do it? The majority of dropouts apparently stop coming to school for one simple reason: "they do not have much success in school and they do not like it" (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Surveys of dropouts, both before and after leaving school, indicate that they do not feel that teachers are interested in them, they are dissatisfied with the fairness of school discipline practices, and in general they are unhappy with the way their education is going. Life without school--whether it be working or raising children--appears preferable to staying in school.

In an analysis of how schools contribute to the dropout problem, Wehlage and Rutter argue that

> The act of rejecting an institution as fundamental to the society as school must also be accompanied by the belief that the institution has rejected the person. The process is probably cumulative for most youth. It begins with negative messages from the school concerning academic and discipline problems. As these messages accumulate into concrete problems--failing courses and thereby lacking credits required for graduation--the choice is between continuing an extra year or more in a setting that offers increasingly negative experiences and dropping out (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986, p. 385).

The process of dropping out of school may begin as early as the primary grades. Lloyd (1978) found that by the third grade, student differences in achievement, ability, family socioeconomic circumstances, and retention enabled researchers to predict accurately the later educational attainment of 75% of the students studied. The two most highly predictive kinds of achievement--reading achievement and language skills--are clearly within the domain of school influence, as is grade retention and, to some degree, ability. It may be that within the first few years of public education, schools have already sorted students into those who will and will not succeed, and have begun to "educate" them accordingly. Some students then move to the "margins" of school life in a series of stages, often beginning with desperate attempts to survive in an environment that blocks their chances for success, and then moving toward a rejection of school values and goals that leads to either passive withdrawal or defiant rebellion (Sinclair & Ghory, 1986). Any serious attempt to reduce the dropout rate must focus on school factors which contribute to this process and which schools themselves can change. It appears, for example, that large classes in large schools alienate students and produce dropouts. Programs which do not help students develop clear postgraduation plans for themselves foster early school leaving. Instruction that neglects the individual needs of students, or that does not provide the opportunity for all students to experience success, may push students out of school. Prejudicial disciplinary practices may lead to frustration and failure. Tracking masks great inequities in the allocation of resources, which may drive students away. Those students who are assigned to the general education track, for example, receive less rigorous instruction, less guidance, fewer high-quality

teachers, and less of other school resources (Amato, 1980; Oakes, 1982); it is little surprise that they fail to develop concrete educational or career goals and drop out. In these and other areas, educators need to evaluate the effects of school policies and practices and change them in order to reduce the likelihood of students dropping out (Natriello, Pallas, & McDill, 1986).

One result of acquiring a body of information on dropping out has been an effort to identify "potential dropouts" and develop early interventions for them. Such services must be planned to address the real problem of dropping out, and not just its symptoms. For example, excessive absenteeism is often a precursor to dropping out. However, Lloyd (1978) found that absenteeism appears later than the other student variables that correlated with eventual dropping out, indicating that it may be the result or manifestation of other school-related problems. Thus, although strategies such as close attendance monitoring or contests to motivate students to come to school may make it harder for students to drift away from school, it is important to analyze <u>why</u> students are absent. Such an analysis might implicate a weak curriculum, an uninterested teaching staff, or a school climate unresponsive to student and community needs, and might lead to interventions of a very different nature.

In this vein, schools might reduce the possibility that the process of dropping out will begin by building from the known strengths of the system identified through educational research. Studies of early childhood education, for example, indicate that participation in preschool programs is associated with later success in school (Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, 1983). A follow-up study of the Perry Preschool found that, with socio-economic factors held constant, preschool "graduates" had lower dropout rates than peers without preschool, as well as a lower rate of teenage pregnancy, itself a major correlate of early school leaving (Berreuta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1984). A large-scale longitudinal study of desegregation found that black students who attended desegregated high schools had lower dropout rates and higher overall achievement than comparable students in largely-black schools (Crain, Hawes, Miller, & Peichert, 1985). Schools which make an explicit effort to become and remain free of violence, vandalism, and disruption tend to have higher student achievement and lower dropout rates as well (Schriro, 1985). Finally, from the comprehensive research focus on the "instructionally effective school," findings indicate that in schools with a commitment to the <u>goal</u> of student achievement and the <u>means</u> for creating success (including high expectations, competent instructional leadership, and staff quality and continued development), failure rates are low (Berube, 1983). In all of these areas, as in much social science research, the direction of causality is difficult to ascertain. But the evidence is strong enough to indicate that educational improvements such as these are warranted.

Despite the best efforts of schools, some students will inevitably move away from school engagement and toward dropping out. In these cases, it is important for educators to provide services that attempt to reclaim at-risk students and help those students already in the "dropout pipeline." Ekstrom et al. (1986) recommend that schools develop specific services to meet

the needs of four kinds of potential dropouts: pregnant teens, students who work while attending school, students who cannot function in the regular school environment, and students whose home or community environment interferes with school success. In his review of the literature on dropouts, Self (1985) summarizes ways in which schools can discourage dropping out, including close monitoring of student attendance and achievement progress, early contact with parents when problems surface, adequate guidance services, and a wide range of extracurricular activities that appeal to marginal students. In-school alternatives to suspension may also help keep problem students used to coming to school. Sinclair and Ghory (1986) describe services for students at different stages in the process of dropping out. For instance, students who are beginning to experience debilitating frustrations due to school failure seem to need intensive guidance and individualized learning opportunities that rebuild confidence. Students who no longer accept the goals and norms of school--those who are just sitting it out for a while--seem to benefit from programs that negotiate flexibly between school standards and their own values. Students who have been disruptive often respond to much smaller schools and classes and more person-oriented programs, as in many alternative schools.

Successful programs for at-risk students appear also to employ individualized instruction, low student-teacher ratios, more autonomy, and additional guidance and other support services (Hamilton, 1986). They have strong vocational education components (as vehicles for teaching academic skills and knowledge more than for job training), offer career education, and incorporate work experience and other out-of-school learning into the instructional program. In short, these programs modify the school to fit the needs of students.

By looking more closely at the school factors that contribute to dropping out, educators are able to move beyond a discrete problem, with its own specific causes and solutions, to systemwide evaluation and change. Information on dropouts should function not only to identify isolated trouble, but as a sort of warning valve for the educational system as a whole. When it becomes apparent, for example, that dropping out can be predicted from data from students' third grades, or that a general education track provides students with a different experience of schooling that does not serve them well, educators cannot ignore fundamental deficiencies in the overall school program. The fact that some students manage to pass courses and graduate while others fail does not absolve the schools of responsibility. And in urban areas, where so many students leave school early and many others acquire only the most minimal education, educators must take extra care to ensure that all students have real opportunities to succeed.

Improving Hispanic Secondary Education

Hispanic students have not profited from their education, nor have they been well served by the schools. Their academic achievement and educational attainment are among the lowest of any group. Nationwide, in 1984 only 60.1% of Hispanics between ages 13 and 24 were high school graduates and

only 17.9% were enrolled in college. The comparable figures for whites are 83% and 28%; for blacks 74.7% and 20.4% (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1985). Clearly, unless educators can better educate Hispanic students, they will have limited opportunities for social and economic well-being.

This is not only a matter of equity, however. Hispanics (and blacks) are becoming a considerable part of the potential work force, particularly in the large metropolitan areas in which they are likely to continue to live. By 1995 the Hispanic percentage of 15- to 19-year-olds in San Antonio will be 60%, in the Los Angeles metropolitan area over 45%, in Miami 40% in New York 26%, and in Chicago 15% (Valdivieso, 1986). Economic growth and community well-being are linked to the fate of these youth. A failure to adequately educate them clearly means a loss of essential human capital.

Why Hispanic students have not succeeded better in the schools is a simple question requiring a complex answer. Many Hispanic children are born into families living below the poverty level and headed by unmarried females. The poverty rate for Hispanics under 18 is 38.2% as compared to 17.3% for whites. This social background, it is thought, places Hispanic youth at particular educational risk, especially since Hispanic families in the past have participated less in programs like Head Start, which prevent or reduce the developmental problems of early growth in a poor home (Valdivieso, 1986). Hispanic youth also tend to come from homes with mixed English-Spanish language background. Although most Hispanics speak English, and many are native-born, students who are not English-dominant, even if they are bilingual, are likely to be early school failures and to drop out before reaching high school. Hispanic youth in the bottom third of the socio-economic distribution (poverty level and below) leave school at two to five times the rate of their more advantaged counterparts (Hirano-Nakanishi, 1984).

Schooling for Hispanics, however, has not forestalled this potential for failure. In part this is so because we have had inadequate information for improving their school experience, but, more important, conventional schooling ignores or works against their educational needs. We can learn a good deal by looking at attainment and achievement data of both Hispanic dropouts and survivors alike. Hispanic dropout rates are high in the metropolitan areas in which they are a large part of the student population; in New York City nearly 80% of all Hispanic students drop out before graduation, in Chicago 70%, in Los Angeles 50%, in Miami 32%, and in San Antonio 23%. Approximately 40% of Hispanic students drop out before their sophomore year in high school because they reach age 16 before they reach tenth grade (Valdivieso, 1986). Hispanic students drop out in the junior high school years or even earlier because of general academic failure, poor grades, and grade retention. These students usually have limited English proficiency; non-English-speaking Hispanics leave school before the tenth grade at the highest rate (56%). The more English the child speaks, the less chance he or she will drop out although it does not make any difference whether the child speaks only English or is bilingual. The ability to use a language other than English proficiently is not a barrier in school as long as the child is proficient in basic English (Hirano-Nakanishi, 1984).

A second wave of Hispanic students drop out while in high school (almost 25%). Many of these students are overage because their previous academic problems, including language difficulties, have kept them behind. Continuing poor achievement, being ahead of their peers in physical and emotional development, and often the pressure to work to support their usually poor families, or among the females to marry and have a baby, combine to produce additional dropouts. Approximately 19% of the national Hispanic student population drops out between the tenth and twelfth grades. That many of these students might have stayed in school had they been offered more English instruction, and a better opportunity to learn to read and write in English and to do math and science, and received better grades, is an important but unanswerable question now. About this population we know that as many as 56% are enrolled in general education programs, which have unclear goals and are not well-structured for concrete learning. Poor grades, a seemingly empty academic program, the possibility of earning money on a job, and family demands may make dropping out an attractive alternative for failing Hispanic students.

Among the approximately 60% of Hispanic students who do graduate from high school, only about 15% can be considered academically prepared. The remaining group for the most part report grades of C and D and enroll in remedial math and English classes. Unlike other students, most of these Hispanic survivors lose academic ground in high school; in "High School and Beyond," a large-scale U.S. Department of Education study to track the secondary and postsecondary experiences of American youth, 1980-82 Hispanic achievement test scores dropped between the sophomore and senior year. Many Hispanic students were enrolled in general and vocational education programs and thus automatically took fewer of the academic courses needed for increasing intellectual ability and subject matter achievement (Valdivieso, 1986).

Although those Hispanic students who remain in school are more proficient in English than their counterparts who drop out, their language difficulties contribute to their poor academic development. The early goal of bilingual education, as a compensatory intervention, was to bring students not proficient in English into the educational mainstream and thus to reduce their rates of dropping out and cumulative academic failure. Many Hispanic students are considered language proficient because they can use English in context, in social situations where the communication setting provides the linguistic cues, which the child can learn easily; however, a large number of these students are not proficient in decontextualized English, the language of academic learning. They are mainstreamed into the regular classroom because their language proficiency is measured by their ability to use contextual language (Hakuta, 1986). Only newly arrived immigrants receive sufficient special language instruction in the secondary school. Because Hispanic students likely receive less special language instruction than they need, whether it be English as a Second Language or bilingual education, they are continually at risk for low academic achievement, grade retention, and insufficient academic learning.

Hispanic youth, dropouts and survivors alike, do not attend schools adequately organized to meet their needs. The local school as we now know

it is irrelevant to the lives of many Hispanic secondary school students and illegitimate because it does not help them attain the credentials that they need. Most Hispanic youth, especially males, work while in high school; their earnings are used to maintain the family economically rather than for personal consumption, unlike the earnings of other youth. Hispanic youth, especially males, may work as many as 20 or more hours per week while in high school. This work is not acknowledged by the schools nor integrated into the students' programs, and there are no special scheduling arrangements, course credits for work, or coordination between school and work to teach particular skills. Similarly, Hispanic students receive very little academic or career guidance; they are likely to make curricular choices alone because, unlike many other students, they cannot receive advice from their parents who are uneducated and unsophisticated about the implications of the choice of a particular program. Many Hispanic students in noncollege preparatory programs intend to go to college because they believe that college naturally follows high school, but they were never to told to enroll in a particular program to make this progression real. Most Hispanic students rarely see a counselor (the counselor-student ratios in most large urban high schools exceed the recommended ratio of 250 to 1), let alone a Spanish-speaking counselor who can communicate with their parents. Hispanic students must rely on their counselors and teachers to make educational decisions, but because of their social background and academic achievement, and the perception of a lack of parental interest in their education, counselors advise them to enter the labor market, not to go to college. They are advised to enter a vocational or general education track, making it impossible for them to receive the academic learning necessary for postsecondary education (National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics, 1984). The benefits of a general or vocational education, however, are questionable. Vocational education programs provide few immediate or later advantages in the labor market. Fewer than one-third of Hispanic vocational education program graduates work in occupations for which they were trained. And enrollment in a general education program is an invitation to drop out.

To avoid the neighborhood school where they have few opportunities for academic instruction, Hispanics often must go to the Catholic high school, frequently outside of their neighborhood, where they may achieve better and graduate. Many inner-city Hispanic parents with small incomes send their children to Catholic schools, because they feel that these schools teach useful knowledge and skills, like reading and writing, unlike the neighborhood school where many Hispanics are merely taught "life skills."

Unquestionably, for Hispanic students to succeed in academic courses in high schools they will have to be better prepared earlier. This means that in the early grades the schools should provide good second language instruction and offer Hispanic students undiluted academic course content at a progressively more advanced pace. The improvement of elementary education has already borne some fruit. Since 1975, the first National Assessment of Education Progress in which they were identified, Hispanic 9-, 13-, and 17-year-old students have steadily improved their reading proficiency scores. Many Hispanic students, however, still read below grade level; the average reading proficiency of Hispanic 17-year-olds is only slightly higher

than that of white 13-year-olds (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1985). (It must also be remembered that Hispanic students whose English is too limited are not included in the NAEP testing). More Hispanic students are also graduating from high schools; the proportion of 18- to 24-year-old Hispanics who are high school graduates rose from 52% in 1972 to 60% in 1984 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1985), and Hispanic student scores on college entrance examinations have also slowly risen.

Secondary schools, however, cannot be content to depend on these improvements and simply maintain the achievement levels of the students that they receive. Hispanic students are more likely to drop out in the eighth and eleventh grades--in the middle of secondary school, that is--than at transition points to junior or senior high school where their most recent accomplishment motivates them for more education (Hirano-Nakanishi, 1984). The secondary school itself plays a role in creating student success or failure. We have ways, however, of improving the educational attainment of at-risk students. Clearly we can reduce the number of dropouts by reducing the size of classes, by providing intensive individualized instruction in the basic skills in conjunction with work-study projects, with concentrated school counseling and the support of families and social agencies (Hodgkinson, 1985). For the Hispanic potential dropout and survivor the high school should be reorganized into small and diverse academic and support units, instead of academic, vocational, and general education tracks. The result would not be ability grouping, which in the past has meant that some students received an inferior education and a confirmation of their low self-esteem, but rather a form of "intellectual desegregation." The benefits of social contact between the races were the educational basis for school desegregation; the intellectual contact of mixed ability students, especially in the early secondary school years, can increase the number of students who will identify with the academically successful student and thus achieve better.

Many students, however, may not succeed as quickly or as much even under improved conditions. If they are to remain in school and learn, they need incentives and support, like a guarantee of a job or college admission upon graduation. They will also need to take more time to complete high school--without stigma. For Hispanics especially this longer stay in high school can be integrated with part-time work. We already accept the part-time college student who works and goes to school at the same time as a legitimate student. Some students may never succeed academically, however; for them to stay, schools must give equal weight to excellence in all areas, not just test scores, although this is especially difficult at present when the school or school district itself is measured only by academic criteria.

At-risk students achieve better and find schools more legitimate in alternative programs. For many citizens, however, alternative educational practices violate a belief in a common, uniform education for all students, even though accelerated classes, vocational education, and gifted and other types of special education are part of the culture of the American school. When they do exist in the high schools, alternative practices are frequently local and short-lived. This is especially so for alternatives in the education of ethnic minorities. The debate over the value of bilingual

education, for example, is a social argument, not a scientific one; otherwise we should be more patient in waiting for the scholarship to prove its success or failure. To many, bilingual education is dangerously pluralistic ethnic education, not the compensatory practice it was originally designed to be. But to consider "uncommon" any educational alternative for educating ethnic minorities is to misrepresent the meaning of commonality. In many urban schools Hispanics (and blacks) are the majority population. Because ethnicity is a central reality of their lives, it also must be of their schooling: workable educational alternatives designed for these students should not be considered exotic and uncommon.

Attracting and Retaining a High Quality Urban Teaching Force

It is widely agreed that the teaching profession is currently in a state of crisis. Basic changes are needed in the ways teachers are educated and in their professional roles, in status and remuneration, in order to ensure adequate quality and quantity of teachers for the future. These issues have an impact for all of education, but are especially critical for urban schools. Teachers are the most numerous resource in urban schools, they have the most direct and frequent impact on students, and, by virtue of their enthusiasm, resistance, or indifference, they can determine the outcomes of many educational policies and innovations. For many urban students, their teachers may also be an important link to the adult working world and a source of care and support. If urban students are not well served by their teachers, they may suffer personal as well as educational loss.

Long-term improvements in the quality of urban teaching are dependent on major reforms in the profession as a whole. Some improvements, however, can be made now if educators attend to three major concerns: designing appropriate preservice education programs for urban teachers, improving recruitment practices, and structuring work conditions to ensure the retention and continued development of competent professionals.

Each year, urban school districts must fill many thousands of teaching positions. But in the midst of a nationwide teacher shortage, when the number of new teacher education graduates is declining relative to projected needs for new teachers, large urban school districts are having the most trouble filling their teaching rosters (NCES, 1985). Most urban districts apparently are able to hire nearly enough teachers, but this general statement masks a number of concerns. For example, there are critical shortages of teachers for large numbers of special education and bilingual education students in urban districts. In a recent year, over half of the 160,000 Spanish-speaking children in Los Angeles schools were receiving no bilingual education whatsoever, and at least two major cities (New York and Atlanta) are recruiting teachers from foreign countries to meet such needs (Bruno & Marcoulides, 1985). Additionally, the number of minority teachers in urban districts is decreasing at the same time that minority students are becoming the largest segment of the urban student population. The chances are high that an urban student will complete 12 years of public schooling without having had even one minority teacher. For minority students, this means

that they are deprived of successful role models and teachers who may have a special understanding of their problems and needs (Webb, 1986).

Some teaching positions, especially those in the "worst" schools, are not filled at all, resulting in larger classes and extra burdens for other teachers. Furthermore, 1983 data indicate that as many as 14% of newly hired urban teachers are uncertified in their main teaching field, compared to only 7 to 8 % of suburban and rural new hires (NCES, 1985). Many new urban teachers quickly quit their jobs or stay only long enough to get the experience that will qualify them for other, less stressful teaching jobs (McIntire & Hughes, 1982). Finally, many new teachers come to the urban schools from other occupations. A study in New York City found that the average age of new teachers was 33.6 years, and that over half had spent an average of 3.7 years in another occupation (Sacks & Brady, 1985). Whether such teachers are an asset or a liability to urban schools is unclear: they may be more mature and more committed to teaching than other applicants, or they may have character flaws or skill deficiencies that caused them to fail in other occupations and will have the same result in teaching.

These problems illustrate the seriousness of concerns about the quality and preparedness of new teachers in the urban schools. With such diversity of background and education, there is no guarantee that these beginning teachers will have the knowledge or skills to perform well or, moreover, that they will be able to fulfill their own personal and career objectives through urban teaching. More urban teachers than suburban or rural teachers report that they are not satisfied by teaching, that they would not enter teaching if they had it to choose over again, or that they do not not want their children to become teachers (Farber, 1984; NCES, 1985). The high rates of attrition for first year teachers are another indicator of the problem. In New York City during a recent two-year period, 779 teachers quit in their first year on the job; 53% of these left within five months, and over one quarter left in the first month of teaching. In exit interviews, these teachers cited difficulty with discipline, bureaucratic red tape, and curriculum problems as some of their reasons for giving up. Even the first-year teachers who stay on the job report concerns that they are not able to help their students or to cope with organizational constraints (Sacks & Brady, 1985). For new teachers who enter the profession because of a love of learning and to be of service to young people, this frustration can be severely disillusioning; the results are equally disappointing for others who chose teaching in order to gain prestige, approval, or some other personal benefit.

Many urban districts are making efforts to recruit better-quality teachers. Offering higher starting salaries allows some districts at least to remain competitive with their suburban neighbors, who often not only have the edge in attracting the most qualified beginning teachers but are also prone to entice experienced teachers away from city schools. Other districts are using internships and other means to identify promising teachers and to give them specific on-the-job training before hiring them outright. For example, Houston has gone so far as to try to "grow its own" urban teachers. Through a cooperative arrangement between the city school district and three

colleges, high school students who showed interest in teaching were identified and encouraged to pursue a career in education. Extra supports were provided to teacher education students in college, to maintain their interest and to prevent attrition, a particular problem for Hispanics and low-income students. In addition, freshmen and sophomores at the University of Houston were employed as teacher aides in the public schools, as were students in community colleges, as a way of providing financial support and practical experience; and college juniors and seniors were employed as substitutes in a "Work-Earn-Learn" program (McIntire & Hughes, 1982).

Academic courses about urban education are important introductions to the field for preservice teachers (Kapel & Kapel, 1982). Unfortunately, while such isolated courses do exist, teacher training programs specifically focused on urban teaching are relatively rare. Ideally, preservice education should serve three purposes: to orient prospective teachers to the social, cultural, and organizational context of urban teaching, to motivate them to seek teaching positions in urban districts, and to develop the curriculum and instructional skills necessary for teaching diverse populations. Because the "cultural disorientation" experienced by many ill-prepared urban teachers is a major cause of their leaving the profession or transferring to suburban or rural schools, preservice programs should ensure that this disorientation does not develop. The paternalistic cultural deprivation rhetoric of the 1960s, whereby urban teacher candidates were taught to understand the "deficiencies" of minority or lower class backgrounds and their consequences for education, has thankfully given way to more value-free conceptualizations of the cultural differences that must be understood if schools and teachers are to be responsive to urban constituencies.

Urban teachers need to learn such skills as how to develop and implement multicultural curricula, how to individualize instruction for students with a wide range of learning styles, how to deal with differences in language usage, how to mainstream limited-English speaking students into the instructional program, and how to cope with high rates of student mobility often found in urban schools. In general, it is felt that early and extensive urban-based field experiences, of high quality and sufficient variety, are critical for developing commitment to urban teaching and understanding of the problems and potential of urban schools. Many field programs are jointly planned between teacher training institutions and urban school districts (Kapel & Kapel, 1982). In New York, one urban teacher training program provides specific experiences that will help prospective teachers to succeed in urban education. These include extensive field experience, so that students can discover whether they really want to teach and can acquire skills through a gradual, cumulative process; opportunities to work with a variety of curricular programs, grade levels, and types of teachers and students, in order to replace idealistic preconceptions with realistic expectations; the chance to apply educational and psychological theories to practice; and early exposure to working with other teachers, to counteract the tendency toward professional isolation which many teachers experience (Gamble, 1985).

Attracting minorities to the teaching field and helping them to succeed in college and become certified to teach is an important component of upgrading the urban teaching force. Minority students, particularly Hispanics, are prone to drop out of higher education because of lack of money as well as achievement problems. If they do succeed in graduating from college, minorities then tend to fail teacher certification examinations at higher rates than others do. In response to these problems, training programs--especially those at predominantly black colleges--are beginning to provide extra financial aid, support services, and additional instructional help to minority teacher education students (Webb, 1986).

Once hired by city schools, new teachers need help adjusting to and succeeding in their new roles. Too often, novices are given the most difficult assignments in overcrowded classrooms of troubled schools, while experienced teachers with seniority are transferred to more attractive situations. It is unreasonable to assume that such practices will cease. But new teachers can be helped to succeed even under the most trying conditions. Some urban districts use intensive orientation programs to help beginning teachers adjust to the complexities of their jobs, with such features as "foul language desensitization," role playing with "tough" urban students, and discussions with parents and principals about what is expected of them (Foster, 1982). Other districts pair new teachers with experienced mentors to give support and advice about classroom management and motivational techniques, to help new teachers distinguish between problems inherent in the teaching situation and those caused by the new teacher's attitudes or behavior, and to help them deal with discouragement and even hostility toward students or the school environment (Foster, 1982; Sacks & Brady, 1985).

As serious as the problems regarding new teachers are, maintaining a competent staff is an equally critical concern for urban schools. In 1983, new-hires comprised only approximately 6% of the teaching force in large urban districts (NCES, 1985). Teachers with experience can be valuable assets, and some urban school districts are using incentives such as raised salary ceilings and upgraded retirement benefits to keep teachers on the job longer. But if city schools want to retain a proven, experienced staff, they must address two accompanying problems: how to prevent "burnout" that may result from stress accumulated over years of teaching, and how to ensure continued professional growth.

Teacher stress has been much discussed, and by now it has mythic as well as realistic connotations. Contrary to some prevalent notions, not all urban teachers are overworked, unappreciated, frazzled, frightened, or depressed. Nevertheless, there are some aspects of the work lives of urban teachers that do create stress. Shortages of instructional supplies and equipment, poorly maintained school buildings, concerns over personal safety, excessive paperwork, and the lack of support or appreciation may add stress to teachers' lives. Students who are overage, who have serious educational deficiencies, who frequently misbehave, or who lack motivation can present problems for which teachers are ill prepared (Hubert, Gable, & Iwanicki, 1984; Schwartz, Olson, Bennett, & Ginsberg, 1983). Teachers in urban schools also report

that they rarely find help or support from school administrators or parents and that they do not feel a supportive sense of community within their schools (Farber, 1984).

Urban districts are attempting to help teachers cope with the stressful aspects of their jobs by offering crisis services, ongoing support groups, and workshops on causes of stress or stress management. Some districts offer "combat pay" for teaching difficult schools, although wage incentives have not been shown to increase overall teacher satisfaction (Bruno & Negrete, 1983). Importantly, many aspects of current school improvement processes not only raise student achievement but also help to alleviate stress for teachers. Involving teachers in program planning and evaluation, and helping them to make clear connections between their efforts and student outcomes, adds to teacher satisfaction and reduces stress (Rosenholtz, 1985). New forms of inservice professional development are similarly beneficial. Teacher centers and peer supervision, for example, are replacing more passive forms of inservice training and helping teachers to renew their motivation and engagement in urban teaching.

Some of the most intractable problems that affect teachers in city schools--those that have to do with the organization of large urban systems, as well as those engendered by a heterogeneous student population with diverse, often dramatic, needs--will not be solved by improving teacher preparation, recruitment, or inservice training. But teachers can be helped to be more responsive to the needs of urban students, and in doing so will improve the quality of their own work lives as well.

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